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Bureau of Justice Statistics

Programs of the Bureau of Justice Statistics

Extracts from an address
delivered to the
American Society of Criminology
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Programs of the Bureau of Justice Statistics

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

Editor's Note: This paper is extracted from an address delivered to the American Society of Criminology, November 8, 1984.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is mandated by Congress to collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate statistics on crime, victims of crime, criminal offenders, and the operations of justice systems at all levels of government throughout the United States. Since its creation in 1979, the Bureau has developed new programs as well as continued the earlier statistical programs of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Because it is a relatively new agency and many potential users of BJS data are unaware of data bases that are available, the Bureau has developed an "outreach" program. This program includes:

- *How to Gain Access to BJS Data,* a brochure describing the Bureau of Justice Statistics, its programs, and how to obtain BJS data and reports;
- A brochure that identifies BJS staff (and their telephone numbers) who are knowledgeable about the statistical data on various criminal justice topics;
- A catalog (to be published shortly) of all BJS data series giving detailed information on the variables included, the methodology used, the publications produced, the availability of data tapes, how to obtain the various products, and who to contact for assistance in using the data sets; and
- The Justice Statistics Clearinghouse with a toll-free telephone line at the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). The clearinghouse responds to statistical inquiries on a variety of criminal justice topics; NCJRS distributes copies of BJS reports.[1]

Most of the BJS data series produce machine-readable data sets which are stored at and disseminated through the criminal justice data archive BJS sponsors at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. These data sets are disseminated via magnetic tapes compatible with the user's computing facility.[2] Unless otherwise noted, the BJS data bases described in this paper have produced (or are producing) data tapes that can be obtained through the archive.

Data on the Commission of Crime

The Bureau's largest statistical series is the *National Crime Survey* (NCS), the nation's only systematic measurement of victimization rates that collects data through national household surveys. The survey, which began in 1973, measures the amount of rape, robbery, assault, personal larceny, household burglary and larceny, and motor vehicle theft experienced by a random sample of the U.S. population. It also provides detailed information about the characteristics of victims, victim-offender relationships, the victims' perceptions of offender characteristics, and the criminal incident, in-

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[1]Single copies of publications can be obtained free of charge from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850. The telephone number is (301) 251-5500. The BJS clearinghouse can be reached at (800) 732-3277.

[2]Data tapes are made available on a cost-reimbursement basis. For more information contact the Criminal Justice Data Archive at P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. The telephone number is (313) 763-5010.

cluding whether or not the offense was reported to the police, and, if not, why not. The NCS uses a rotating panel sample design in which interviews are conducted in 60,000 households at six-month intervals.

A major effort of the Bureau over the past several years has been the evaluation and redesign of the methodologies used in the nation's two most important statistical series on crime, the National Crime Survey and the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program.

The *National Crime Survey Redesign* project is a total reassessment of the objectives, administration, design and potential uses of the survey and implementation of improvements in the definition of criminal victimization, sample design, survey instrument and estimation procedures. The redesign effort was undertaken in response to recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences and is intended to increase the amount and quality of data available from the NCS and to improve its efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Recent work has focused on strategies for eliciting victims' recall of victimizations, a design for longitudinal measures of the risk associated with various activities to permit the survey to assist crime prevention programs, and efforts to enhance the utility of NCS data to state and local users. One of the changes contemplated is that, beginning in mid-1985, victimization estimates will be made for counties in the NCS sample areas with populations over 50,000. The NCS redesign work is nearing completion; the remaining work consists of deciding which recommended design changes to make and implementing those changes. Most of the changes will be implemented in 1985 and 1987.

The joint BJS/Federal Bureau of Investigation *Assessment of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program,* conducted over the past two and a half years, has produced a draft final report with recommendations for extensive changes in UCR. Following review of these recommendations by the formally appointed UCR steering committee, by directors of the state UCR programs, and by the law enforcement community in the spring of 1985, a final set of recommendations for change will be presented to the directors of the FBI and BJS and to the attorney general.

Possible changes include replacing the current summary reporting system with unit-record reporting. Such a system would make it possible to provide much more detail about each crime incident than is now available, while at the same time not adding to the reporting burden and to the costs to contributors. It is anticipated that a subset of agencies would be asked to provide even more extensive data in order that national estimates can be derived about issues of national concern such as domestic family violence, child abuse, and arson. Considerable attention is being given to ways in which more stringent standards of quality control can be used in the program, including routine random audits, self-certification by local departments, and quality edit checks written into software programs at the local, state, and federal levels.

Law Enforcement Data

Recognizing that very little national-level police administrative and management data exist, BJS commissioned a study in January 1984 of the need for such data, including recommendations as to what types of data should be collected. A second phase of this effort, begun in October 1984, involves: an analysis of existing data sets of police statistics; a survey of small police agencies about their data needs; the development of a survey questionnaire and handbook for a national collection effort; a discussion of various sampling designs; and a pretest of the proposed survey.

Prosecution and Adjudication Data

In the fall of 1981, BJS funded the first national survey of *indigent defense services* since 1973. Data were collected covering staffing levels, salaries, caseload, type of system, funding levels, organizational setting, legislative authority, method of compensation and attorney selection.

Prosecutor Management Information Systems (PROMIS) produce case track-

ing data focused on the prosecution and trial of cases for selected municipalities and counties. This year BJS published the second in a series of statistical descriptions of felony case flow in selected prosecutor's offices throughout the country that use PROMIS data. The report analyzes data from 14 jurisdictions for felony cases that reached final disposition in 1979. The next report in the series covers 28 jurisdictions. Key variables include: the number of felony cases screened; number of cases rejected or referred at screening; reasons for case rejections; number of cases filed; number of cases dismissed; reasons for case dismissals; number of guilty pleas; number of pleas to stop charge; number of guilty verdicts at trial; number of sentences to incarceration; number of sentences to state prison; and case processing times by type of disposition.

A recent initiative will go beyond the PROMIS data by tracking approximately 10,000 defendants from several states and 50 counties across the nation as they move through the criminal justice system, as well as after their cases have been adjudicated and they have served whatever sentences may have been imposed. These data will provide a longitudinal account of what happens to persons arrested for several serious crimes (such as burglary and robbery) and, more importantly, an ability to compare the effectiveness of different criminal justice policies in reducing crime, court congestion, jail and prison crowding, recidivism, and other problems facing the criminal justice system.

Offender-Based Transaction Statistics (OBTS) programs are state-level information systems to track state offenders through the criminal justice process from arrest to final disposition. BJS has completed an initial project leading to the development of national OBTS data standards to guide state participation. Under this program, several states have submitted data conforming to the OBTS standards for analysis and publication. Plans for the future call for increasing the number of states supplying OBTS data.

Of particular concern is the lack of data on the *pretrial case processing* phase of the criminal justice process; for example, rates of rearrest and failure to appear of those who are on bail or other forms of pretrial release are unavailable on a national basis. As a first step in filling this void, BJS sponsored a study to determine the feasibility of developing a national pretrial data base. Twenty states were surveyed to investigate organizational considerations in data collection, and a survey instrument was developed and tested in three jurisdictions. The results of the initial phase were positive and the project has been continued. Procedures and forms will be refined, a sample of approximately 15 sites will be selected, and data will be collected and analyzed.

Annual Corrections Data

The Bureau's Correctional Statistics Program provides systematic data on correctional populations and agency workloads covering probation, local jails, state and federal prisons, and parole.

The *National Probation Reports* series provides annual data, by state, on the number of admissions to probation supervision and the year-end total of persons under such supervision. Additional variables include: entry type, exit type, sex, race, ethnicity, offense type, conviction status, and supervision status. Complete national reporting began with the publication of *Probation and Parole 1981*. Data tapes were not developed in the past because the amount of information was manageable manually. However, consideration is being given to building data tapes to allow users computerized access to these data.

The *National Prisoner Statistics (NPS)* series dates back to 1926. It provides year-end and mid-year counts, by jurisdiction, of prisoners confined in state and federal institutions. In July 1983, a new program to gather information on the characteristics of those offenders admitted to or released from prisons was initiated – the National Corrections Reporting Program as a part of NPS. This series will provide information on demographic characteristics, offenses, sentences, and time served for each admission to and

release from state prisons. This series will be integrated with Uniform Parole Reports data to provide a complete overview of sanctioning across the states from prison entry through termination of parole. Thirty-five states are participating.

The *Uniform Parole Reports* program, begun in 1966, provides data on the populations and characteristics of persons admitted to and released from parole supervision. The program also gathers information from states annually on legislative and administrative changes likely to affect the time sentenced and served in correctional institutions. Additional variables include: entry type, exit type, and the sex, race, ethnicity, and supervision status of the individuals involved. As with probation, data tapes were not developed in the past because the amount of data was limited enough to be manageable manually. Changes in data collection methodology will allow the parole data to become available on data tape through the National Corrections Reporting Program.

Over the past several years, an issue of great concern has been the absence of a data series that systematically measures recidivism. BJS is developing a program, designed to link BJS correctional series data with FBI criminal history information, which will, for the first time, enable BJS to derive a representative sample of persons released from prison, collect longitudinal data, and ultimately develop estimates on the incidence, prevalence, and seriousness of subsequent arrests and dispositions. Prison release and criminal history data will provide an opportunity to examine the relationship between factors such as sentence length, time served, and prior felony incarceration history, on the one hand, and post-release performance, on the other. These data will be available along with a number of socio-demographic characteristics of the inmates. The data will be used to issue a series of reports on selected topics, as well as annual indicators for trend analysis. To the extent that privacy and confidentiality regulations allow, BJS will make public use data tapes available through the archive for secondary analysis.

The National Prisoner Statistics Series also reports separately on those state prisoners sentenced to and awaiting execution. Variables include age, race, sex, Hispanic origin, education level, and marital status. Criminal justice data include offense, date of sentence or removal, method of removal, prior felony convictions, and legal status at year end. Data also are obtained on the status of death penalty laws. Data tapes have not been developed from this series.

Periodic Corrections Surveys

In addition to the annual data collection programs, the correctional statistics program uses less frequent surveys to collect information that is too expensive to capture every year. These include the periodic surveys of jail inmates and state prisoners and the censuses of jails and prisons.

In early 1984, the quinquennial *Census of Adult State Correctional Facilities* was conducted. The census is designed to obtain information on facility characteristics, inmate populations, confinement space, programs, inmate work assignments, employment, health and safety conditions, special inmate counts, and expenditures. The 1984 data will be particularly useful in conjunction with the 1974 and 1979 census data.

The *Survey of Inmates of Adult State Correctional Facilities* will be conducted in 1985. This survey will obtain a profile of a nationally selected random sample of 15,000 state prisoners as to such factors as demographic characteristics, current offense, prior criminal record, drug and alcohol history, socioeconomic characteristics and military service. This survey is an update of the 1974 and 1979 inmate surveys.

During calendar year 1983, the *Census of Jails and Survey of Inmates of Local Jails* was conducted. Jail census questionnaires were mailed to all local correctional facilities nationwide, collecting information on inmate population, detention authority, capacity, building/renovation plans, confinement space, personnel, health and safety programs, and expenditures. The jail census was pre-

viously conducted in 1970, 1972, and 1978.

The *Survey of Inmates of Local Jails* gathered information on a national random sample of roughly 6,000 jailed inmates. Variables of interest included demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, current offenses, detention status, prior criminal record, jail activities, drug and alcohol use, military service, and health care. The inmate survey was conducted previously in 1972 and 1978.

Federal Justice Statistics

A major recent priority is the development of a comprehensive Federal Justice Statistics Data Base tracing individual offenses from investigation through prosecution, adjudication, and correctional processing. Currently, the data base includes input from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, and the Bureau of Prisons and covers calendar years 1979-81. This represents the first time that federal justice data have been incorporated in a single data series. Data from additional investigative agencies and covering additional years are now being obtained.

Justice Expenditure and Employment Data

The *Survey of Justice Expenditure and Employment,* begun in 1967, produces annual national and state-level data on the costs of the justice system and the numbers of persons employed by justice agencies. Its geographic and substantive detail varies over the years because of changes in survey methodology. Data for 1967 to 1970 are not available on tape.

Juvenile Justice Data

In January 1985, BJS entered into an interagency agreement with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for a cooperative effort to improve the quality, quantity, and availability of juvenile justice data. A first step in this effort will be a workshop of juvenile justice data producers and users, statisticians and survey methodologists to assess the quality of available data, identify areas where data should be collected, and make recommendations for improving existing data series and for establishing new series to collect needed data. Following the workshop, the recommendations will be studied and implemented as appropriate and as resources allow. A second component of this agreement will allow BJS to begin analysis and publication of juvenile corrections data collected by the Census Bureau under OJJDP sponsorship.

Other Efforts

BJS efforts to link users who need data with the data they need are not limited to BJS data bases. The most ambitious of these is the first edition of the *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice,* a comprehensive look at crime, its victims and offenders, and the criminal justice system using available data and written in non-technical language. Additionally, the Bureau continues to publish the annual *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics,* a reference document that presents criminal justice statistical data from more than 100 national sources in an easy-to-use single volume.

The *Computerized Index to Data Sources* is being developed to help users identify data bases of use to them from the multitude of data bases that exist at all levels of government. Because of the size, complexity, and fragmentation of criminal justice systems, it is extremely difficult, costly, and time consuming to determine what data bases exist, where they are, and what they contain. As a partial solution, BJS has begun development of a pilot computerized index to existing national, federal, state and local criminal justice data bases which should be a service to users who are seeking data on a particular topic. □

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